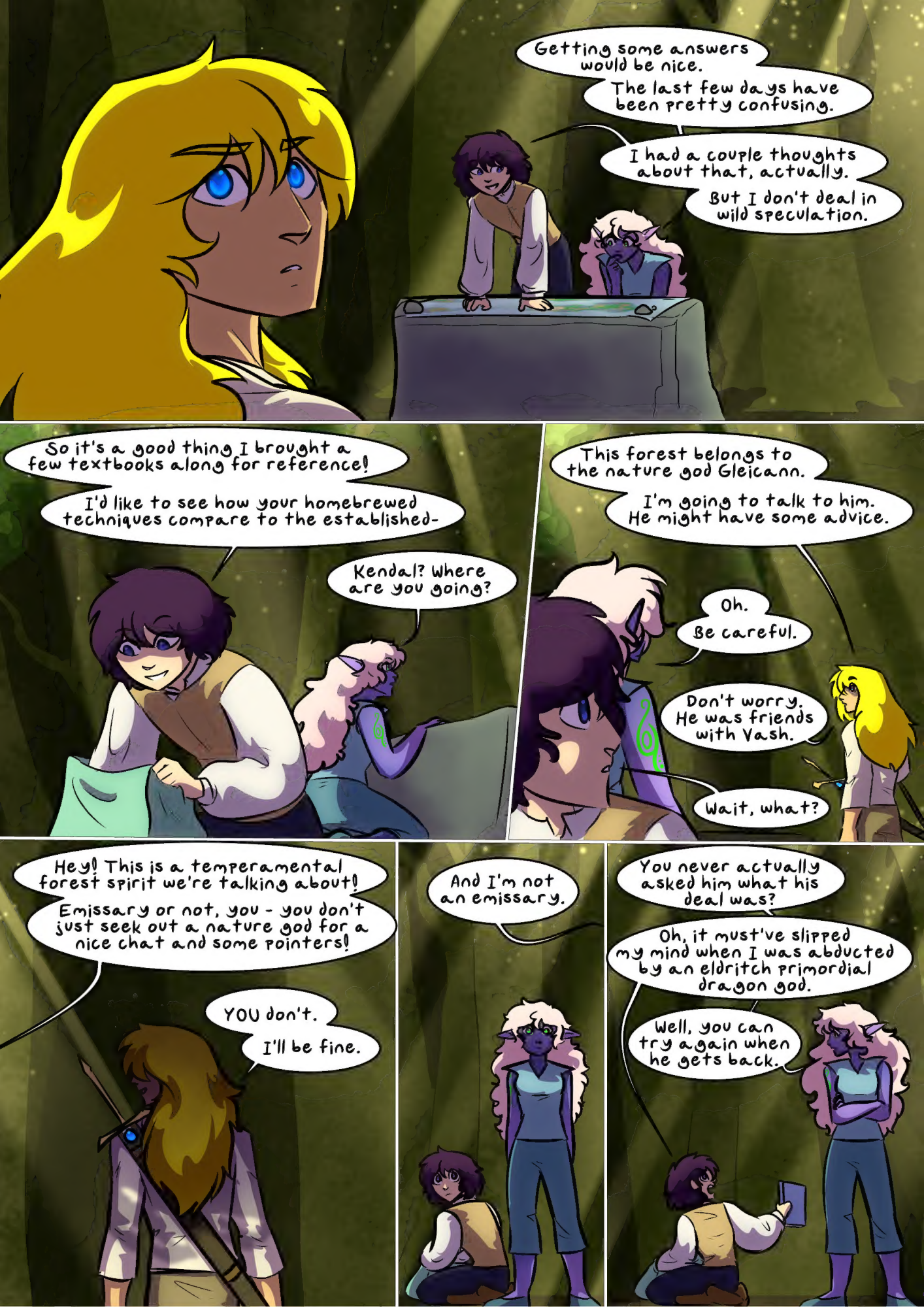
Chapter 8
Echoes

So we're right about here, where the Storm has been marked...
And we're aiming for the monastery here.
We'll make our way to the Crow's Head Plains and charter a ship at Argist.
Make port in Hollowsong, travel overland into the mountains, and reach the Monastery as quickly and efficiently as possible.
Any questions?
That's a really long way.
...Well, yes, but that's not a question.
What I mean is, isn't there anything closer?
For breaking a magical link nobody knows anything about? Sorry, the soulshaper monks are our best and only option.
What about the Aseran mage academy?
It's closer, and they already know you.
They could help you find a way to control or sever the link.
I -
I understand why you'd think that, but I think...
I think it would be unwise to return there right now.

...Why?
...You didn't lie about your connections, did you?
What? Of COURSE not!
How could you- what do you TAKE me for?!
Okay, okay!
Then why not ask them for help?
sigh
Because I think there's a strong chance that the academy would rather study the Dragon than break the link.
Frankly, it's not an easy temptation to resist.
The mage academy is a beacon for people seeking power, and... well, like it or not, I'm the only living Void Mage right now.
I'd rather not end up on the wrong side of the microscope.

...Okay. So you think these monks are a better option?
Definitely.
The Soulshaper Monks learned centuries ago that the soul is not the supreme arbiter of one's being.
It is inextricably linked with the mind, and the mind is known for flexibility.
Through long, careful practices, the mind can reshape the soul.
The monks mostly specialize in providing therapy and aid to those who have lost limbs - a prosthetic can regain almost full functionality and sensory input if the soul is shaped into it.
They're mostly known for OPENING those links, but CLOSING one should be similar.
But they also help people with congenital soul conditions, like malformed or incomplete magical links.
Wow, you really know a lot about these guys.
My family's had dealings with them before.
They're reliable and discreet.
And this won't just help me.
The soulshaper monks have experience with a wide array of anomalous magical conditions.
It's possible they'll have some insight into YOUR unique magic as well!
Oh, good point!


Getting some answers would be nice.
The last few days have been pretty confusing.
I had a couple thoughts about that, actually.
But I don't deal in wild speculation.
So it's a good thing I brought a few textbooks along for reference!
I'd like to see how your homebrewed techniques compare to the established-
Kendal? Where are you going?
This forest belongs to the nature god Gleicann.
I'm going to talk to him. He might have some advice.
Oh.
Be careful.
Don't worry. He was friends with Vash.
Wait, what?
Hey! This is a temperamental forest spirit we're talking about!
Emissary or not, you - you don't just seek out a nature god for a nice chat and some pointers!
YOU don't.
I'll be fine.
And I'm not an emissary.
You never actually asked him what his deal was?
Oh, it must've slipped my mind when I was abducted by an eldritch primordial dragon god.
Well, you can try again when he gets back.

Gleicann.
Can we talk?

POP!
SNAP
CRACK
PWK
CRUNCH
RRRM
Ahh. Vessel of Vash.
I have heard whispers of the divine blade, and the Right Hand that now carries it.
You must be Kendal, both blade and man.
CRICK
GNN
FWP
...Hello.
You've gotten... taller?

Sorry, I don't mean to be rude.
Vash remembers you... shorter and happier?
A little less gaunt and terrifying?
It is a recent development.
I apologize for startling you.
The handful of mortals who reside within the boundaries of my forest have begun to fear its dangers.
As their fear grows, I grow more fearsome in turn.
They no longer listen for my pipes on the wind. Their ears instead strain for the howls of beasts in the night.
I'm sorry to hear that.
Vash loved to hear you play.
Do you know why they fear you now?
It is difficult to say.
I am primarily concerned with the health of this forest.
The plants, the animals, the fungus - these are the elements of my domain.
I cannot readily distinguish which aspects the mortals find fearsome.
But there have been changes.

Many creatures reside within the shelter of my trees.
But I have observed... strangeness near the mortal settlement.
Beasts that do not eat as they should.
Plant-eaters growing too large and turning on other animals.
Meat-eaters separating from their packs, killing without consuming the remains.
It is troubling.
Chimeras.
Chimeras beseiging a town.
Is it her? The Collector?!
The God-Taker?
It is possible.
But I cannot say.
I cannot readily distinguish between individual humans.
She's not human.
I put a sword through her heart.
Perhaps she can no longer be killed.
But she will always be human.
It is nature inborn.
A nature you and I neither possess nor comprehend.
Do you not understand?
This is much of why we fear her.
We can barely even see her.

...I see.
So you don't know if it's her.
I do not.
And you can't pin down whoever's creating these chimeras.
Unfortunately, no.
But you can see that I'm different.
Oh, yes.
You are not mortal. Your body and soul are distinctly unique.
It is... difficult to describe.
What fills a vessel that was crafted to contain a god?
I know that you are not human, but I do not know what you are.
...Does this trouble you?
It doesn't matter.
Even if it isn't her, someone is making chimeras and endangering innocent people.
I have to do something.
Interesting.
What?
This is my domain, yet you immediately seek to interfere in my affairs.
Between gods, this would pose a severe transgression.
So you cannot be a god.
So I have no cause to stop you.

I'm just saying, a runic circle for EVERY incantation seems very overcomplicated.
Sometimes time is of the essence!
And I'm telling YOU that safety is by DEFINITION not "overcomplicated"!
A haywire healing cantrip can do horrible things to a person!
What if you were trying to mend a broken bone but you filled the fracture with stomach lining instead?!
How could you possibly screw up a broken bone THAT badly?
Bone already wants to grow more bone! Just feel it out and help it along a little!
What do you MEAN "feel it out"?!
Hey.
Kendal! How'd it go?
There are chimeras in the forest.
They've been harrying a small town.
Is it-?
I don't know if it's her.
I don't know if I WANT it to be her.

But Vash hasn't been moved.
It's not definitive, but...
I think this is unrelated.
Is that... good or bad?
I won't have to watch anyone die.
Well... no matter who's creating or commanding them, the woods still aren't safe.
We won't want to be out here after dark.
CRACK

I don't think we want to be in the open NOW!

SWISH
You're not her handiwork.
RRRR
SHUNK

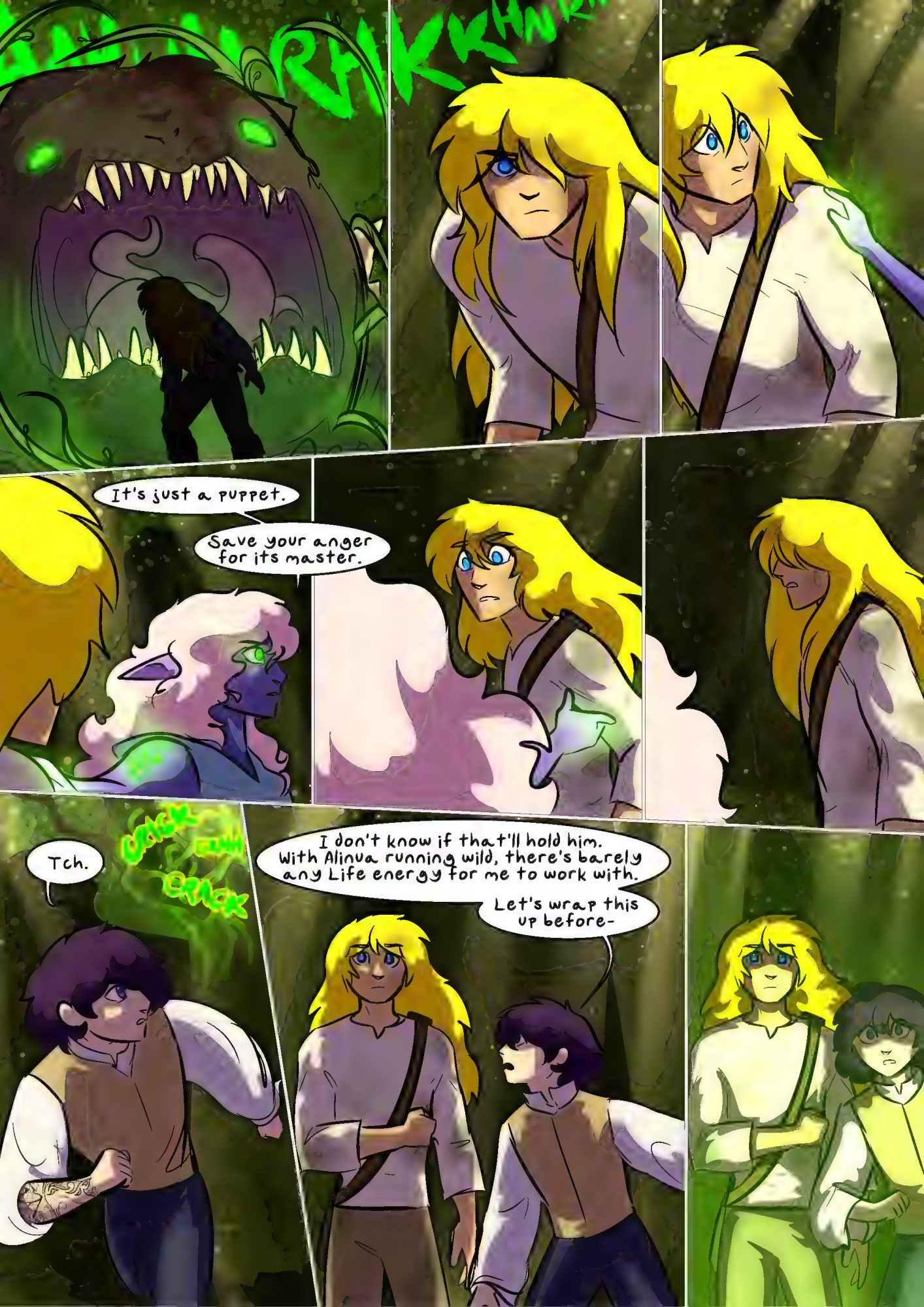
KENDAL!
Hang on! I'll-
SHRIP
Don't worry.
This won't take long.

WHAT
All right, I've had enough of these surprises!
How is he DOING that?!
Who...
Who did this?

Alinva! Focus!
Don't let it run wild! The power is an extension of your will!
If you cast from emotion you won't have any-
control

CRACK
Erin!
Behind y-★
KENDAL!!

Wh-
HEY!
Better check on your friend.
WHOOSH
WIND
cough
cough
*!!
CHUNK
SHINK


RHKKHNR
It's just a puppet.
Save your anger for its master.
Tch.
CRACK
I don't know if that'll hold him. With Alinva running wild, there's barely any Life energy for me to work with.
Let's wrap this up before-

You weren't built to carry so much power.
It's twisted you so much, you've forgotten what you were supposed to be.
I'm sorry.
I don't know how to give that back.
I can only take this away.
...How did you-?
CRACK

Argh!
The-
my-
He's still got my BAG!
Wait!
KENDAL!
TUP
Gah!
What is he THINKING?!
I can't risk hitting him!
What's he thinking?
Between the chimeras and the person using them?
Probably "This is how my city died."

SHF
THMP
SKRTT

Kh-HAHA!
I THOUGHT that monster must have cracked a couple ribs.
But then I thought, "no way would he be leaping through the trees with an injury like that!"
You're a weird one.
...You're a Ferin.
Very observant!
But then... you couldn't have been the one-
Yeah, listen, this has been fun, but I should go before your friends catch up.
And YOU should really take a break.

How is he so FAST?!
Look, we'll explain later-
CH-IKHAAAHHHH!
WHAM
an you hear me?
Ah!
SHIT
...Are you okay?
Yes.
Thank you.
I don't just mean physically.
The chimera, the mastermind, the similarities - it was obviously really upsetting-
It was.
But it isn't as similar as I thought.